

TRPA wins Regional Plan lawsuit vs. Sierra Club

By Kathryn Reed

A judge on Monday sided with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in a lawsuit that would have unraveled the bi-state regulatory agency's Regional Plan that was adopted in December 2012.

In February 2013, the Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Sacramento to stop the Regional Plan from taking effect in its entirety.

U.S. District Court Judge John Mendez on April 7 said the agency could keep the document in place. In June he had handed TRPA a partial victory by saying the Regional Plan update does not violate California law by allowing local jurisdictions to have more authority. That was one of the items in the lawsuit.

Total maximum daily load, concentrated coverage, soil conservation, best management practices and the ozone threshold were the main issues the two groups have problems with in the latest Regional Plan. In each case the judge sided with the TRPA, saying the agency was adequately addressing the concerns.

No one from the Tahoe Area Sierra Club was available for comment.

"We respect the concerns of our colleagues at the Sierra Club, Friends of West Shore and Earthjustice about the new Regional Plan. It is not a perfect plan, but the League to Save Lake Tahoe also recognizes that it has the potential to help Tahoe's environment through multiple safeguards that require restoration and environmental improvements with any new development or redevelopment," Darcie Goodman Collins,

executive director of the League, said in a statement.

In the past the League and Sierra Club have been lockstep in challenging the TRPA. Not so in this case.

“It will give investors more confidence and homeowners more confidence,” Jeff Cowen with TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News* of the judge’s decision.

With the Lake Tahoe Basin being one of the more litigious oriented areas in the country, as well as overregulated, some investors are said to have shied away from doing business here.

TRPA had been operating as though the Regional Plan update was the law of the land because no injunction had been imposed. This is proven by the adoption of two area plans at the lake in the 16 months since the plan was ratified. These are planning documents that are now required by TRPA by jurisdictions in the basin to create.

Calif. groundwater depletion could be catastrophic

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

LOS BANOS — Flat as a tabletop, the furrowed, brown farm fields east of this San Joaquin Valley town are some of the most productive on Earth.

Every spring, they are planted with a smorgasbord of crops that in one form or another are trucked to grocery stores across America, from fresh juicy tomatoes to freeze-dried onion flakes, honeydew melons to tortilla chips.

Now that bounty is threatened by a crisis of geological proportions: The land is sinking – crippling the region's irrigation and flood control infrastructure and damaging aquifers that are buffers against climate change.

Nature, though, is not to blame. This problem is self-inflicted, driven by the frontier-style exploitation of the last unregulated resource in California: groundwater.

"We are looking at a material impact of a magnitude that is potentially catastrophic," said Cannon Michael, a sixth-generation farmer who grows tomatoes, onions and other crops near Los Banos.

Today's drama is only the latest chapter in a long-running saga of sinking. Three generations ago, so much groundwater was pumped from aquifers that half the valley sank like a giant pie crust, sagging 28 feet near Mendota and inflicting damage to irrigation canals, pipelines, bridges, roads and other infrastructure.

What stopped it were two massive government-funded irrigation efforts – the federal Central Valley Project and California State Water Project – that flooded the region with water from distant California mountains, relieving pressure on the area's natural underground water supply. But the fix was temporary. Today, drought, climate change and other forces have unleashed a new era of groundwater pumping, triggering some of the worst land subsidence ever seen in California. Near Michael's farm, the valley is predicted to drop 17 feet by 2060.

Read the whole story

Motorcyclist dies nears Virginia City



A Fallon man died April 6 in
a motorcycle accident.
Photo/Provided

A Fallon man died Sunday when the motorcycle he was riding stuck a guardrail.

Nevada Highway Patrol troopers said James Edward Cooper, 67, was on Highway 341 near Virginia City on April 6 at 12:50pm when he failed to make a turn and hit the rail.

“Mr. Cooper was ejected from the motorcycle where he received critical injuries,” troopers said in a press release.

He was taken to Renown Medical Center in Reno where he died.

Witnesses or anyone with additional information are asked to call 775.689.4623 or email dhildebrand@dps.state.nv.us.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Survey: Alcohol more dangerous than pot

By Matt Ferner, Huffington Post

By a wide margin, Americans believe that alcohol is more dangerous to a person's health and to society in general than marijuana, according to a Pew study released Wednesday.

When asked whether marijuana or alcohol would be more harmful to personal health, if marijuana were as widely available as alcohol, 69 percent of Americans said alcohol is more dangerous, while only 15 percent said that marijuana is more dangerous. Fourteen percent said both or neither are more dangerous.

Respondents showed more trepidation when asked to consider marijuana's potential effects on society as a whole, but a strong majority still believed that alcohol is the more harmful substance. Sixty-three percent of those polled said alcohol is more dangerous, with 23 percent saying marijuana is more dangerous and 11 percent responding that both or neither are more harmful.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Keys Blvd., state streets to be torn up

By Kathryn Reed

Avoiding Tahoe Keys Boulevard this summer might make for a

better driving experience.

Gerhardt & Berry Construction out of Sparks will begin a water line replacement project the first week of May that could take all summer.

The South Tahoe Public Utility District board last week awarded the \$3,346,572.70 bid. Nine bids were submitted for what engineers had estimated would be at \$4.1 million project.



The state streets water line project in South Lake Tahoe will be finished this year.

Photo/LTN

The 2- and 4-inch lines will be replaced with 6-, 8- or 12-inch lines. The side streets get the 6-inch lines and Tahoe Keys Boulevard 12-inch, while Michael Street will have 8-inch. There will be 11,752 feet of pipe installed.

All the affected houses will also get meters.

This is the second phase of the State Street Water Line Project. South Tahoe PUD is making a concerted effort to replace water lines throughout its service area so fire suppression regulations are met. As the South Lake Tahoe-based agency does so, it is putting in the state mandated meters. All STPUD customers are expected to have meters in the next five years to meet the 2025 state deadline.

Sierra Nevada Construction, the second lowest responsive and

responsible bidder, had filed a bid protest. No one from the company was at Thursday's meeting.

The company was challenging the subcontractor being used for the jack and bore work, the pipe bedding supplier and the experience of Gerhardt & Berry. Staff and the board members didn't believe the challenges were sufficient to not award the bid to Gerhardt & Berry.

Work on Tahoe Keys Boulevard will be Monday-Thursday. One lane will always be open, but that means delays as the traffic is controlled. Formal detours will not be set up, but there are ways to circle around throughout neighborhood streets or use Fifteenth Street off Highway 89.

"We will try to get as much done before Memorial Day as we can," Shannon Cotulla, STPUD engineering department manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*, after the April 3 meeting.

Some of the state streets had work done in 2013. This year the remainder of the side streets off both sides of Tahoe Keys Boulevard will get new water lines down to Jeffery Street.

The other project South Tahoe PUD will be doing is installing a force main bypass for sewage. On Tahoe Keys the sanitary force main was installed in the 1960s, so if there were a failure, there is no backup. In other words, there is no place for sewage to go except for spilling or to create a backup into residences. The bypass will create an alternative if there were ever to be a breach in the line.

During the water line replacement STPUD will place door hangers at residences when construction will take place out front or if water will have to be turned off. At times people will not be allowed to park on their street. Access to driveways will always be allowed, but it may require getting the construction crews to move a metal plate over an open trench.

Southern California skier dies at Northstar

A Southern California man died Sunday at Northstar.

Marc L. Coleman, 67, of Van Nuys could not be revived at the Truckee at resort.

“Deputy coroners on scene determined this to be an apparent accidental ski death, although an autopsy may be pending,” Placer County sheriff’s deputies said in a statement. “Initial reports stated ski patrol was working a traumatic ski accident.”

Coleman was wearing a helmet.

No further details were available about the April 6 death.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Why homes are lost to wildfire



2007 was the worst fire season in the Lake Tahoe Basin when 254 houses on the South Shore were destroyed.
Photo/Lake Valley Fire

By Melissa Mylchreest, High Country News

Each year, wildfires claim hundreds of homes throughout the West in what's known as the wildland-urban interface. This issue roars into the national spotlight every summer as footage of engulfed subdivisions flickers on TVs across the country. National fire suppression budgets reach into the billions of dollars every year, much of that cost associated with protecting homes and structures. But are we approaching the problem from the right angle?

Jack Cohen is a research physical fire scientist with the U.S. Forest Service, based at the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory. With four decades of experience, he is a preeminent expert on wildfire and home ignitions, and a founder of the Firewise Communities recognition program, a project of the National Fire Protection Association that helps homeowners protect their property against wildfire.

Years of study have convinced Cohen that the loss of homes to wildfire is as much a sociopolitical problem as it is a physical, on-the-ground problem. Agencies and the public alike approach the issue as a question of fire suppression and control. Cohen, on the other hand, believes that fire is here

to stay, and that proper mitigation, awareness and planning can make living with fire a whole lot easier – and safer.

Read the whole story

Vacation home sales rebound in 2013

By Jann Swanson, Mortgage News Daily

Vacation home purchases recovered strongly in 2013, helping to offset some of the inevitable flagging interest in investment purchases the National Association of Realtors said last week. NAR's 2014 Investment and Vacation Home Buyers Survey shows an increase in vacation-home sales during the year of 29.7 percent. There were 553,000 such sales in 2012, an estimated 717,000 in 2013.

At the same time investment purchases retreated from the elevated levels of 2011 and 2012, falling 8.5 percent to 1.10 million in 2013 from 1.21 million in 2012. There were 1.23 million such sales in 2011. NAR's investment sales figures do not include institutional sales. Sales of owner-occupied homes rose 13.1 percent to 3.70 million last year from 3.27 million in 2012.

NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun said the pullback in investment activity is understandable. "Investment buyers slowed their purchasing in 2013 because prices were rising quickly along with a declining availability of discounted foreclosures over the course of the year," he said.

Read the whole story

Missing South Tahoe woman found safe

Camilyn Kay Price-Miller of South Lake Tahoe has been found alive and safe.

She had been reported missing on April 4 by South Lake Tahoe police officers. She contacted police April 5 when she learned people were looking for her.

It is not known where she had been.

Her husband, Jeffrey Miller, remains in custody on an attempted murder warrant out of Nevada County. He allegedly tried to beat his wife to death in November.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Online poker revenues lagging

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Internet poker hasn't proved so far to be the bonanza some had hoped for.

The first monthly report on online poker gaming win showed it exceeded only bingo compared to other casino games, slot machines and sports betting.

The state Gaming Control Board this week approved applications from six companies to extend their internet poker, licenses

which were to expire if the companies did not start the games online in Nevada within six months.

Read the whole story